

**Claims:**

1 -16 (cancelled)

17. (Currently amended) An apparatus for handling wafers, wherein the apparatus is configured to place said wafers from a wafer-holding cassette disposed on a loading station into a wafer processing vacuum chamber that is a closed enclosure in vacuum wafer processing operation, and wherein said wafer processing vacuum chamber has a wafer holding device including a cooling plate and a heating plate, the apparatus for handling wafers comprising:

an external handling device having grippers for transferring said wafers between said cassette and said wafer processing vacuum chamber, wherein said external handling device is disposed ~~in front~~ outside of said wafer processing vacuum chamber; and

an internal handling device disposed within said wafer processing vacuum chamber and is provided with a transverse guide (11), said internal handling device having at least one fork arranged in a mount on said transverse guide to move said fork with at least two degrees of freedom and arranged to interact with said grippers of said external handling device to receive a wafer therefrom, said fork being arranged to move said wafers between said cooling plate and said heating plate,

wherein said wafer-holding cassette disposed on a loading station is disposed ~~in front~~ outside of said vacuum chamber, wherein said cooling plate and said heating plate are disposed one in front of the other in said vacuum chamber, and wherein said internal and external handling devices are configured to move said wafers from said wafer holding cassette ~~in front~~ outside of the vacuum chamber to the said cooling plate and said heating plate in said vacuum chamber and back, and wherein said vacuum chamber and said external handling device are surrounded by an enclosure.

18. (Previously presented) Apparatus as specified in claim 17 wherein said fork is arranged to be movable under a placement location for said wafers on said wafer holding device.

19. (cancelled)

20. (cancelled)

21. (Previously presented) Apparatus as specified in claim 17 wherein there is provided a cooling device for cooling said internal handling device.

22. (Previously presented) Apparatus as specified in claim 17 wherein there are provided multiple heating and cooling plates arranged in a stack in said chamber.

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Cancelled)

25. (Previously presented) Apparatus as specified in claim 17 wherein said fork is arranged to be preheated.

26. (Previously presented) Apparatus as specified in claim 25 wherein said fork is arranged to contact said heating plate for said preheating.

27. (Cancelled)

28. (Previously presented) Apparatus as specified in claim 17 wherein there are provided multiple chambers arranged in a stack.

29. (Cancelled)

30. (Cancelled)

31. (Currently amended) Apparatus as specified in claim 17 wherein said ~~enclosure~~ is purged by gas at a low overpressure wafer-holding cassette is disposed along a linear axis

extending through said cooling plate and said heating plate, and wherein said internal and external handling devices are configured to move said wafers along said linear axis.